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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TASHKENT 001243

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN  
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY  
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

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SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: U/S Burns Meets FM Norov

REF: STATE

CLASSIFIED BY: Holly Lindquist Thomas, Second Secretary, State,  
Pol-Econ; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Under Secretary Burns led an inter-agency delegation to Tashkent on July 12-13 that included NSC Senior Director for Russia and Central Asia Michael McFaul, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East and South Asia David Sedney. Burns used the occasion of a July 12 meeting with Uzbek Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov to propose the establishment of a bilateral commission to regularize and structure bilateral relations between the U.S. and Uzbekistan. Burns told Norov that the Administration sought a pragmatic and constructive relationship that could foster cooperation on security, trade, counter narcotics and the stabilization of Afghanistan, as well as sensitive issues such as civil society and human rights.

¶2. (C) (Summary cont'd) Norov did not directly respond to the proposal for a commission, but he saw possibilities for cooperation. Norov maintained that sensitive human rights and civil society issues were internal matters, and he offered no sign of movement on an on-going negotiation over an exchange of letters that would formalize joint understandings on religious freedom. Burns noted that the United States would not seek to impose its values on others; we would not lecture. But human rights and democracy issues were and would remain important to Americans, to our Congress, and to the President. We would need to find a way to manage and discuss these issues as we rebuilt our relationship. Norov expressed familiar skepticism about the government of President Karzai, but he emphasized that Uzbekistan shared our interest in security and stability there. He also conveyed deep suspicion of Russian behavior in the region, including perceived efforts to divide Central Asia. Burns and Senior Director McFaul emphasized that the U.S. would seek stable, sovereign partners in the region; President Obama was not interested in great games or competition. End Summary.

#### Bilateral Relations

¶3. (C) Norov expressed the usual lament about the

deterioration of relations with the U.S. in the post-2005 period, which he ascribed to the "ideological" U.S. policy of that time, which sacrificed security cooperation and a base in Uzbekistan to appease human rights interests. The Uzbek government was watching the new Administration with great interest and hoped that pragmatism would prevail in its approach. Burns pointed out that President Obama's speeches reflect a new approach to foreign policy. The U.S. was interested in practical dialogue in areas of mutual interest - even with states, like Uzbekistan and Russia, where we would continue to disagree on important issues. Burns proposed establishing a U.S. -Uzbek bilateral commission that would meet on a regular basis to begin a structured dialogue on issues of common concern, including security, economic issues, political questions and the human dimension, including civil society and human rights.

#### Human Rights

¶4. (C) During a lengthy and frank exchange, Burns made clear that while the Obama Administration would not seek regime change or force American values on other countries, we believed that human rights and the development of open and protected civil societies were essential characteristics of good governance and of valued partners. Part of rebuilding relations with the United States would be finding a way to discuss and manage these issues. Burns pointed to the case of jailed opposition leader and former Uzbek businessman Sanjar Umarov, suggesting that the GOU find a way to

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release him on humanitarian grounds. Norov said that only the Uzbek Senate could grant amnesty to prisoners, continuing with a familiar comparison of incarceration rates around the world (pointing out that the U.S. incarcerates far more of its citizens per capita than Uzbekistan) and noting that Uzbekistan does not try to interfere in the U.S. criminal justice system. Burns raised the issue of ICRC prison access, to which Norov replied that Uzbekistan was the only country in the region that allowed the ICRC into its prisons at all, a point which he said underscored the double standard that exists whereby Uzbekistan is held to a different standard from its neighbors. He said that Uzbekistan also wanted a strong civil society, but in a multi-ethnic country such as Uzbekistan, there were rights as well as responsibilities that called for certain limitations on behavior that could be socially destabilizing.

#### Religious Freedom

¶5. (C) Raising the proposed exchange of letters on religious freedom, Burns said that he had hoped this would be resolved by the time of his visit and urged the GOU to bring this process to conclusion. Norov did not speak directly to the negotiations over the exchange, but said he understood the issue was a legacy of the previous administration. He pointed out that there were sixteen different religious faiths that practiced freely in Uzbekistan and said that limitations on proselytism were necessary not because of Christian denominations in the country, but to control "Wahhabist" Islamists who he noted were very active immediately following independence. He also noted the irony of Uzbekistan's situation in light of a recent proposal on the part of French President Sarkozy to ban the wearing of veils in public.

#### Afghanistan

¶6. (C) Norov expressed skepticism about the course of events

in Afghanistan, the impossibility of a purely military solution to the problems, and the weakness of President Karzai. He said that Afghanistan needed a strong, charismatic leader drawn from among its Pashtun population who could enforce a writ beyond the limits of Kabul. Norov added a pitch for President Karimov's 6 plus 3 dialogue (among neighboring states, the UN, NATO and Russia, but without Afghanistan). Burns said that the U.S. was cognizant of the fact that the problems of Afghanistan could not be solved by military means alone. The new strategy places a heavy emphasis on development and on cooperation with Afghanistan's neighbors. He noted U.S. support for an ADB-financed extension of the railroad from Hairaton to Mazar-e Sharif, which Norov said the Uzbek side strongly supports as a means of opening links to ports in Pakistan and Iran and thereby lessening the ability of Russia to control Uzbekistan and Central Asia.

Russia

17. (C) Burns briefed Norov on the outcomes of the July 6-8 Moscow Summit, noting important progress on arms control and on the transit of lethal material through Russia to Afghanistan. He said that the U.S. and Russia did not agree on all issues, such as Georgia and Missile Defense, but that relations were improving. Burns emphasized that the U.S. was not interested in a competition with Russia in Central Asia, which he said was a relic of the past century. Norov noted that the Russians were very unhappy with the Manas agreement, despite public statements. He said that Uzbekistan would attempt to block the rumored Russian use of a base

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in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, which would require overflights of Uzbek territory. Uzbekistan also opposed the creation of the Rapid Reaction Force under the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). He said that Russia under Putin and Medvedev was pursuing an aggressive, chauvinistic policy in the territory of the ex-USSR and that Uzbekistan would resist this policy in every way possible. The CSTO Rapid Reaction Force, Uzbekistan fears, is merely a pretext for intervention in domestic conflicts such as that in Georgia, in which Uzbekistan will not partake.

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